

**Third Grade**

Perfect Eggs  
By Megan Harlander  
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Kern County

Once upon a time there were three hens, Bitty, Fluffy and Princess. One day Princess said, "I wish I could lay golden eggs. I heard the farmer's children talking about a goose that laid a golden egg."

"But your eggs are still valuable even though they are not golden," said Bitty. Fluffy agreed but they still did not convince her.

Princess went outside and sat in the golden sunshine to soak up its light.

After Fluffy had finished laying her egg, she saw Princess sitting in the sun. "Why are you sitting in the warm sun?" said Fluffy.

Princess replied, "I'm trying to get golden eggs from sparkly golden things."

Later she ran over to the garden and looked for golden bugs to eat. When the farmer came out, he dropped some corn kernels for the hens, and Princess tried to eat the most golden ones. She even tried to eat the farmer's gold ring.

The next morning Princess laid her egg. It was not golden. She went and asked Bitty and Fluffy, "What can I do to get golden eggs?"

Bitty said, "Your eggs are marvelous just how they are! They are worth more than gold. People need your eggs to make breakfast, lunch and dinner."

Fluffy added, "Your eggs have minerals. They have vitamins and protein. There are over seventy-two billion eggs sold a year in the US and some of those are yours!"

Bitty and Fluffy said together, "Most of all, they taste delicious!"

After they had told her all the good things about her eggs, she thought about what they had said. "You're right," Princess said. "People need my eggs. I think my eggs are perfect just the way they are."

And from then on Princess was content with her eggs.

**Fourth Grade**

The Grape that Couldn't Decide What to Be  
By Riley Tomczak  
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Amador County

Once upon a time there was a grape that couldn't decide what to be, so first he asked his mom. She was busy cleaning their part of the vine when the little grape said to her, "Mom, I don't know what I want to be!"

"Well, there are many things. Your great-grandfather was a raisin. They have lots of nutrition and can prevent the onset of certain chronic diseases. That's why I want you to be a raisin," his mom declared.

"N'aaaaah," said the little grape, "I don't want to bake on the vine all summer."

So then the little grape asked his dad. He said, "Dad, I don't know what I want to be. Can you help me?"

His dad said, "Sure, son. Why don't you become grape jelly? Grape jelly has virtually no fat."

"Ugh... I don't want to be smushed while they turn me into jelly."

So the little grape asked his grandpa. He said, "Grandpa, do you think you could help me figure out what I want to be?"

"OK," said Grandpa Grape. "I think you should be red wine because it lowers peoples' cholesterol."

"I don't think so Grandpa, because I don't want to be in a barrel for months and months."

Finally, the little grape thought and thought and thought. And then he knew what he wanted to be!

"I'm going to be a table grape because they don't sit on a vine all summer getting hot and dried out, and they don't get smushed to jelly and they don't have to be in a barrel for months at a time."

"Yes'siree, a table grape, that's what I'll be," said the little grape.

**Fifth Grade**

The Adventures of Compost Man  
By Daniel Kaplan  
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Los Angeles County

One sunny day in the farmlands of the Central Valley of California, a girl named Olivia came running down the street screaming, "Help, Compost Man! Help!"

"What is it, Olivia?" Compost Man asked.

"Soil Stealer is stealing all of the compost from our garden composter!" Olivia explained.

"That fiend," Compost Man said.

Then they got in the Tractor of Truth and drove toward the garden.

"Stop right there," Compost Man said heroically.

"Yeah," said his sidekick, Dirt Lad. "Compost plays a crucial role in our agricultural exports. Without compost, we won't be able to grow enough healthy food and our soil will be depleted!"

"That's too bad," Soil Stealer said, "I need compost for my own garden."

"Why don't you make your own compost out of things like apple cores and watermelon rinds?" Compost Man asked.

"But then I wouldn't get to steal your compost anymore," Soil Stealer snarled.

"Exactly," exclaimed Compost Man.

"But I like stealing your compost," Soil Stealer said.

Then Compost Man declared, "Okay then, I'll fight you for it!" And that began their epic battle.

First, Soil Stealer tried to beat Compost Man with fertilizer. But it was no match for the nutrients in compost, otherwise known as "black gold."

"Ha, ha" said Compost Man, "You'll never beat compost. It is an important factor in protecting our water supply, and it is made by worms."

"Not worms," Soil Stealer said, "I'm allergic! Achoo! Achoo!"

"Ha, ha," Compost Man said.

Then Soil Stealer shouted, "I'll be back!" as he drove away in his evil-mobile.

One week later...

Once again, Olivia came running down the street screaming, "Help, Compost Man!"

"What is it this time? Compost Man asked.

"Soil Stealer is stealing the compost again!" said Olivia.

"This time we won't let him get away," said Dirt Lad. So again they got in the Tractor of Truth and drove toward the garden.

When they got there, they didn't see Soil Stealer hiding behind a bale of hay. Then, when Compost Man had his back turned, and Dirt Lad was checking out the other side of the garden, Soil Stealer got a rope and put it around Compost Man and tied him to a chair. When Dirt Lad saw this, he said, "Don't worry. I'll go get help," and ran off.

"Finally, I have defeated Compost Man!" Soil Stealer said.

"You may have defeated me, but you'll never defeat compost! It encourages healthy root systems," Compost Man said.

"Wow, very interesting," Soil Stealer said sarcastically. "Now I'm going to steal your compost."

Then Compost Man said, "Not so fast!" and he used his mightiest superpower—the Compost Blast. Suddenly, there was a huge explosion.

When the smoke cleared, the ropes were gone. Worms were everywhere, and Soil Stealer was on the ground, trembling and sneezing. Just then, Dirt Lad and the cops arrived and took Soil Stealer away. Once again, the day is saved by Compost Man and Dirt Lad!

**Sixth Grade**

Forest Friends  
By Mackenzie Allen  
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Debbi Hoy, Teacher  
Siskiyou County

"Hey, what do you think you will turn into?" asked Douglas. He was hearing the loggers, machines and the log trucks coming to do their jobs.

"What do you mean?" asked all the other trees. They were not paying attention to what was happening around them.

"I mean... Whoa, holy leaves, I am being cut down, YEAH!" exclaimed Douglas. He was so excited, as he had heard great things about what logs turn into from the old timers who were very wise. They seemed to know a lot for trees that had never been cut down. But only a select few of the other trees in the forest would get chosen to be cut down.

"Now what are they going to do to us?" asked the other trees in the forest, who never seemed to listen.

"Do I need to go through the whole process of logging again?" Douglas sounded tired. "I think you young seedlings need to pay more attention to the old timers."

"Would you mind, please?" whimpered the smaller trees. So Douglas started to tell them about the logging process

"Trees are harvested mechanically by a big machine called a feller buncher. It has a long boom with a saw attached to the end. It can grab the tree, cut it and lay it down all by the push of some buttons by the operator sitting in the cab of the machine. Most feller buncher's can cut trees up to 24 inches in diameter. Then the logs will stay on the ground until a skidder drags them to the landing. Once piled up in the landing, another machine called a loader will load the logs onto a log truck. The log truck will then haul the logs to a sawmill." Douglas replied.

"Wait, before you go on, what is the machine called that is taking off my branches?" asked Ponderosa, one of Douglas' friends.

"Oh, thanks for reminding me," said Douglas. "That machine is called a delimeter. It takes the tree and with its big boom, strokes the tree, taking off the limbs. It can cut one long log into smaller logs. Some of the really tall trees can have up to two or three logs cut out of it."

"Once we are piled up in the landing, we wait to be loaded onto the log trucks. Since we are close to the top of the pile, we will probably get loaded on the second or third log truck." Douglas loved the idea of being in the process of logging and talking about it also.

"Hey, we are being loaded," shouted Douglas, as he and five other trees swung through the air in the leader's grapples and were being placed down on the log truck.

"I'm getting squished down here!" yelled a log from the bottom of the pile.

Douglas continued to tell the other logs about what was going to happen next. As the logs traveled down the bouncy, dirt road out of the forest, Douglas told the other logs about going to the sawmill. Once they got to the mill, they would be unloaded and then sorted by whatever species or sometimes what size each log was. They would then be put into other separate piles and hopefully would turn into something very useful.

When they got to the mill, everyone was indeed separated. Some stayed in the same pile for a year, while others were cut and made into boards, plywood and panel sheets. Douglas was happily turned into boards, which were used to build a house. He loves everyday he is there and reminds himself once in a while about that wonderful day when he was cut down and going through the logging process and everything that happened that day. He wonders sometimes if the other trees are happy with what they turned out to be.

"I will never forget that day!" Douglas said proudly and he probably never will.

**Seventh Grade**

Remembering  
By Kaelin A. Swift  
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The car had stopped, Rosa realized, as she slowly sat up. She rubbed her eyes and yawned, peering out the window as she did so. They had stopped on the side of a road overlooking a valley. Below she could see green grass and miniature fields in neat rows. Frowning, she turned her head to look at her grandmother.

"Abuela," she asked, "what's happening?" Her abuela had been knitting but now she stopped.

"I don't know, Rosa," she said. "Maybe something is wrong."

"The car has stopped," Rosa's mother said from the front seat, "and we can't get it to start again." Grumbling, her father got out of the car and lifted up the front hood.

"This could take a while," he said.

"Well in that case," said abuela, "I think I'll go and get some air," and she slipped out, closing the door firmly behind her.

"I'll go too, mama," Rosa said and she followed her abuela to the side of the road. When she reached her side, she was looking down into the valley with an odd expression on her face.

"What is it, abuela?" Rosa asked.

"Oh Rosa, it's nothing. I'm just remembering."

"Remembering what?" asked Rosa.

"I was remembering how things were when I was a girl. When I was ten we moved from the ranch we worked on in Mexico to a farm in California. It wasn't very far from here. We lived with many other families there in the camp. The grownups all picked or packed crops. Peaches, nectarines, grapes, asparagus, potatoes—there were many of them. The produce went to feed people not only in California, but all over the country and the world. I watched my little brothers, cooked and did camp chores until I was thirteen and then I worked in the packinghouses with the women.

"That sounds like a lot of hard work, abuela," Rosa said, eyes wide.

"It was hard," abuela said. "This was in the 1930's and the country was in the middle of the Great Depression. Many people were very poor. Everyone at camp was, and with so many people jobless, we were glad to have our jobs. We all shared what we had to get used to our new life. When I started school, I had to learn English. That was such a struggle for me."

"Oh, abuela," Rosa said softly.

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Abuela smiled at her granddaughter's amazement. "I have many good memories of that time, she said. We made many friends at camp. We were a community whose life circled around the crops. Every Saturday night in the summer we would have a fiesta. I have many memories of those fiestas. And the peaches, oh how I remember eating peaches with other girls in the camp. We would bite into them and the juice would dribble down our chins. But that was so long ago!" Abuela made a funny sort of sound that was between a laugh and a sob.

Rosa stared at abuela. To her, only eight years old, abuela was very old. She could not imagine abuela as a girl, even one that was older than her, with peach juice running down her chin. No, Rosa thought, abuela is too old for her to ever have done that. But abuela was talking again, interrupting Rosa's thoughts.

"Oh yes, we had our rough times, but looking back I wouldn't trade any part of it. When your life circles around the crops, you feel an affinity with the earth. It's powerful. This one little part of California, the Central Valley, produces much of the produce for millions of people. Central California is an essential part of the nation's agricultural production"

Rosa looked out over the fields in the valley thinking about all of what her abuela had said. It had been a hot afternoon, but now in the early evening, the air had a balmy feel to it. Even though it was quite warm, Rosa shivered, not knowing why. Behind her, she heard the car start up.

"Mama, Rosa," called her mother, " come on. We've got it working." Abuela turned away from the valley and made her way to the car. Rosa followed her, but not before turning to look at the fields below once more.



**Eighth Grade**

What's the Difference?  
By Tyler Sweet  
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Debbi Hoy, Teacher  
Siskiyou County

"Hey, Tyler, your quad is fast!" yelled my cousin, Zack, as he sped across our front pasture with me riding shotgun.

Because Zack was heading straight for one of our irrigation ditches at about thirty miles an hour, I screamed, "Watch out!"

Zack had just enough time to say, "Huh?" before he ran the quad head first into the half-filled ditch.

"What is this hole doing in the middle of your field, Tyler?"

I guess I should tell you that Zack is a city boy. He's smart, but sometimes I have to explain country life whenever he visits our ranch.

"Zack, this isn't a field; it's a pasture. This 'hole' is an irrigation ditch that delivers water to the grass."

"Why does your grass need water?"

"To grow into hay for cattle feed. Special stomachs allow our cattle to convert grass into milk and meat, which humans can eat," I replied, climbing out of the mud.

"Oh yeah. I get that. You do have a bunch of cows don't you? Say, where are they?"

As I helped Zack raise the quad out of the ditch, I suggested driving him to the back pasture where our cattle were grazing.

"Let's go!" Zack agreed, using his sleeve to wipe off his muddy face.

We drove slowly to the back pasture. Zack stood up and yelled, "Whoa! That cow is huge."

"Um, Zack, that's not a cow. That's our bull."

"Cow, bull, whatever. What's the difference?" Zack asked.

"A big one," I said sitting down. This explanation was going to take some time.

"Zack, a cow is a mature female who has had a calf. Now a male calf is called a bull calf."

I continued, "Now a mature bull is a male used for breeding purposes. It helps to make calves. Unlike a bull, a steer is castrated so it can't make babies. Grain-fed steers provide all your fine steaks, ribs, roasts, hamburger and liver."

"I'll pass on the liver. Wow, I didn't ever think about that before. I mean, in the city, we never see the whole steer, just the parts packaged by the supermarket. Hey, Tyler, it's getting dark. Don't you think we should be heading back to the house?"

"Good idea," I said.

"Oh, wait. Can we do some cow tipping on the way back?"

I almost didn't have the heart to tell Zack that cow tipping was just another one of those urban legends, but I did. "First of all, cows take short naps at certain times of the day or night, and they don't lock their legs when they sleep they actually lay down. Even if you could catch a cow sleeping, it would be too difficult to push one over because full size cattle can range anywhere from one to two thousand pounds. That's nearly the weight of a small car. Now that one-ton Angus bull lying down over there is taking a little snooze. If you still want to test that cow tipping legend, be my guest."

"Um, I don't think so, Tyler."

With that, we drove the quad back to my house. After my dad came home from work, we all sat down to a delicious roast beef dinner. Dad asked Zack if he'd like to help us brand and vaccinate cattle tomorrow.

"Brand? What's that about?" Zack asked.

Dad explained that branding marks our cattle with a unique registered Rocker S sign, and vaccinating the cattle protects them from various diseases.

"Would you like to help?" Dad asked.

"Yeah! That's real cowboy stuff!" Zack replied.

After dinner, Zack and I hit the hay early. Even so, I had to shake Zack awake at daybreak. After breakfast, we chased 24 new calves into a holding pen and then vaccinated them with a syringe. Finally we branded them, using a hot metal rod.

After that, Zack's dad came to take him back to the city. As they drove slowly away, I heard his Dad say, "That's one big cow, son."

Zack smiled and said, "That's not a cow, Dad. That's a bull."

"Cow, bull, what's the difference?"